

Creative processes of impact making: Advancing an American Pragmatist methodology

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to provide new insights into the social impact of creative research methods.

Design

Using the new methodology of Cultural Animation, we highlight how knowledge can be co-produced between academics, community members and organizational practitioners. Drawing on the UK Connected Communities programme, we explore examples of immersive and performative techniques including arts and crafts, drama and poetry.

Findings

We showcase the practical and theoretical benefit of such exercises to generate impact and influence. Empirically, we demonstrate the potential of Cultural Animation to bring together researchers and community members in useful partnerships that foster dialogical exchange. Theoretically, we extend and develop the value of American Pragmatism by highlighting how democratic, iterative and practical learning plays out through the materials, networks and processes of Cultural Animation.

Social Implications

Exploration of our examples leads us to propose and explore impact as a form of legacy which captures the temporal, processual and performative nature of knowledge sharing and co-production.

Originality/value

The methodology of Cultural Animation is innovative and has not been tested widely to date although, as we illustrate, it is particularly useful for encouraging interaction between academics and the wider world and developing and nurturing interactions and relationships. It carries potential to contribute new insights to the theorisation and lived experience of organization.

Keywords: American Pragmatism; Cultural Animation; Impact; Arts-based Research; Relevance Gap; Knowledge Co-production

Introduction

The ‘impact agenda’ has forced business schools to find new ways to show their influence on organizational life, having central significance not only within the current UK funding environment (via the *Research Excellence Framework*) but also across the globe (for example, *Excellence in Research* in Australia and *Evaluating Research in Context* in the Netherlands). The demand for evidence of social influence has been heightened by the climate of budgetary austerity which has seen spending on universities come under intense scrutiny with the result that impact has become a dominant metaphor for judging the worth of management research methods (Briggle, Frodeman & Holbrook 2015; Travers, 2009) and the quality of research outputs. The concept of impact acts as a filter (Back, 2015) for focusing attention on the practical value of academic work, one positive effect of which has been to promote engagement with (and a measure of accountability to) community members outside the academy. Seen more cynically, however, the impact agenda may serve less favourable ends. As Rhodes, Wright and Pullen (2017:139) have put it, the impact agenda may also entail a ‘policing function’ which ‘is arranged as an attempt to ensure that academic work maintains a neoliberal status quo by actually having no real political impact’.

A recent special issue dedicated to impact in management research by the British Journal of Management points out that impact is a “territory which can be inhabited in multiple ways” and “we, as management researchers, need to consider how much we see ourselves engaged in a process of producing better artefacts (e.g. a new framework or model), producing better questions that shape an agenda, bettering our individual career or shaping the educational process by which future managers are prepared for their role(s)” (MacIntosh, Beech, Bartunek, Mason, Cooke and Denyer; 2017: p.10). Most theories of impact (see Pettigrew, 2011) focus on bridging the divide between academia and practice by assuming that theoretical insights come first and are then translated into meaningful practices. This

embedded assumption not only marginalises theoretical stances that are inductively achieved or co-produced with practitioners, but also re-enforces the privileged place of scientific knowledge at the expense of other forms of knowing such as *experiential knowledge* which arises from lived experience and is locally embodied, *presentational knowledge* which involves all senses and is represented in aesthetic forms, and *practical knowledge* which refers to the skills and competencies needed to solve problems (Heron and Reason, 1997). The reliance upon knowledge transfer may also explain why theories of impact are rarely based on the empirical investigation of the relationship between academics and practitioners and of practices of impact-making (Jarzabkowski, Mohrmanand & Scherer, 2010), with a few notable exceptions (MacIntosh, Beech, Bartunek, Mason, Cooke & Denyer, 2017). Addressing this paucity of research, we provide empirical insights from the UK Connected Communities (CC) Programme to re-frame the concept of impact by advancing an American Pragmatist methodology of impact making – a methodological framework which has democratic, experiential knowledge at its core.

The UK Connected Communities programme has, since 2011, sponsored nearly 300 community-based research projects with cross-council funding under the leadership of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). In reflecting upon examples from this empirical case, we argue that creative research methods can facilitate greater dialogue and interaction between practitioners and academics and that these same methods can be used to highlight the potential legacy of such exchanges. Our contention is that re-framing impact as *legacy* helps us move beyond mechanistic metaphors and assumptions about translation between theorists and practitioners. Using the term legacy, by contrast, captures the temporal, processual and performative nature of impact-making. By drawing attention to examples from the CC programme, we highlight the types of creative engagement that can facilitate dialogical encounters (Beech, MacIntosh & MacLean, 2010) and collaboration between

academics and practitioners to creatively co-produce knowledge that carries the potential for lasting influence. Our argument is that this may offer inspiration for other researchers to theorize their own collaborative research practices and, furthermore, to rethink the nature and meaning of impact as a process embedded in practice (Jarzabkowski, Mohrmanand & Scherer, 2010).

Theoretically, our analysis is informed by American Pragmatism and particularly the works of John Dewey. His democratic experimentalism has shaped the development of a new research methodology entitled Cultural Animation (CA). CA animation is a process of creative and collaborative learning with/through objects (Goulding, Kelemen and Kiyomiya, 2017), art-forms and drama. We demonstrate how CA generated enduring social networks and processes of social engagement in which research was co-produced in collaboration with practitioners (Kara, 2015). To explore this method in practice, the article is organised as follows; first, we provide a short incursion into American Pragmatism (AP) with a focus on John Dewey's work. We then introduce the Connected Communities Programme and the methodology of Cultural Animation, followed by exploration of the research projects central to our analysis. We proceed to analyse the data in the light of Dewey's democratic experimentalism and in so doing, refine the meaning of impact to include processual, temporal and relational aspects. We conclude by highlighting the usefulness (and limitations) of Cultural Animation practices of impact making for organizations and management research methods.

American Pragmatism: Introducing John Dewey's democratic experimentalism

There are various approaches within American Pragmatism which are relevant to our case: James's "radical empiricism" (2000), Peirce's perspective on "thinking clearly" (1878), and Mead's elaboration of conversational gesturing (dialogue) as a social process (1934/2015).

For us, however, Dewey's democratic experimentalism (Dewey, 1916/1980; 1919/2000) offers the most useful platform to explore the methodology of Cultural Animation. Dewey's work is well-recognised as an important contribution in the literary canon of classical American Pragmatism for its focus on the ability of individuals to enquire through experience - the most important factor for achieving scientific progress – and thereby improving the human condition. For Dewey (1925/1981), theories must have practical consequences, otherwise they are simply intellectual acrobatics. Thinking and acting are two sides of the same coin. To think means to experience the world and not accounting for experience means escaping into abstract theory. This is an approach with clear intellectual links to Cultural Animation, a process based upon immersive action and embodied reflection.

Rejecting the idea that science has a special method to access reality and is superior to everyday forms of understanding, Dewey's work (1925[1981], 1927[1991], 1932[2008], 1938[1991], 1939[1988]) sees knowledge as deeply intertwined with experience and argues for a democratic form of collaboration between those who participate and those who theorise. This collaboration means that advancing theory has practical consequences for humanity. In Dewey's democratic experimentalism, enquiry and democratic behaviour are intertwined (Gouinlock, 1990). Democratic behaviour refers to “how we make collective decisions, how we treat and experience others, how we communicate, how we confront problems and disagreement, how groups interact, and how we attend to experience in general” (Pappas, 2008, p. 220).

Democratic experimentalism sees the relationship between research and practice as one of co-operation and co-ordination based on four principles: 1) organized intelligence (which emphasises equality among researchers and practitioners), 2) an attitude of openness toward new ideas, 3) democratic styles of communication, and 4) a general willingness to let

experience decide (Vo and Kelemen, 2017). While research and practice hold different possibilities and limitations, they necessarily inform each other so that knowledge production benefits from the situated experiences of all participants and can be tested by monitoring improvement in experienced problems (Pappas, 2008). Democratic experimentalism does not aim to produce knowledge that represents the truth about the world, rather its main role is to provide practical tools for people to think and act more effectively in a world shot through with contingency and ambiguity. Advancing this position, we seek to redefine the impact of research as *materialising in changes in thinking and/or doings as a result of testing ideas in practical scenarios*. Over time, as we see in our case, impact becomes *legacy* as practices and ideas travel more widely and give rise to enduring networks. We describe some of the practical scenarios in what follows as we turn to our empirical case, the Connected Communities Programme.

The Connected Communities Programme: Towards new methods of knowledge co-production

The Connected Communities Programme aims to support research that builds understanding of the changing nature of communities and their role in sustaining and enhancing quality of life. It has an interest in producing new insights about communities as well as new methods that involve community members in the co-design of research and the co-production of knowledge (<http://connected-communities.org/>). The format of the resulting outputs varies from conventional academic papers and practice reports to zines (small circulation publications), performances, installations and other artistic forms, all of which place a firm emphasis upon collaboration, transdisciplinary work and practitioner engagement. This article draws on empirical insights from three CC projects carried out between 2012 and 2014 (which we term Phase A) and a subsequent CC “Legacy project” carried out between 2014 and 2015 (Phase B). The Legacy project evaluated Phase A’s impact both on Phase A

participants and on newcomers to the research. The main method in use throughout both phases was Cultural Animation but in Phase B we also used interviews, group discussions, observation and on-line surveys.

Cultural Animation

Cultural Animation was originally developed as a methodology of community engagement by The New Vic Theatre, as part of their outreach work with marginalized communities between 2002 and 2012. This theatre was involved in both phases of the research. Cultural Animation evolved into a methodology of knowledge co-production throughout the CC projects discussed here. We describe it as a creative methodology (Gauntlett, 2007) which includes a variety of visual, performative and sensory exercises (Barone & Eisner, 2007) which aim to exceed the possibilities afforded by traditional research methods (like focus groups, for example) by accentuating the relational, processual, creative, material and emergent nature of social life and its networks (Kara, 2015). Cultural animation gives equal status to academic expertise and practical skills, its aim being to connect reflection with action.

In one workshop from phase A entitled “Forced Journeys through Crisis”, for example, participants from various social and organizational backgrounds were invited to explore potential reasons for personal journeys. They drew upon their own experiences of needing to move home for work purposes as well as considering contemporary issues surrounding migration, economic conditions, war and natural disaster. The group, working in the outdoors, embarked upon a literal journey and was set the task of “rescuing” things from around them to create an imaginary new world. Gathering natural artefacts and talking as they went along, participants reflected on the idea of living with necessity and not excess and then created rules and values for a new, shared way of living. At the end of the walk,

community charters were written for this imaginary new world and participants were then asked to reflect upon what they could take from the workshop into their “real worlds”; ideas that they could action. Participants stated that they had developed a number of “take-home” ideas such as being more aware of their own impact on the environment and the importance of empathy for people making their own “difficult journeys” (observation notes).

Cultural Animation workshops and exercises such as these are designed to provide a “safe” space away from existing hierarchical structures. Participants use craft, art-making, music, drama, movement and other collective tasks which require little or no formal skills or training. Within the process, a central role is played by the ‘cultural animator’ who is best described as a facilitator who helps participants draw on personal aspirations, heritage, culture and experiences to immerse themselves in the exercises (in our case, a theatre practitioner). The animator is an organiser of work and an imparter of skills and usually has intimate working knowledge of a particular community and art/craft making processes (Beebejaun et al, 2014). Facilitated in this way, academics are encouraged to engage in the process alongside practitioners, which is a conscious strategy to disassemble theory-practice hierarchies.

The approach to communication and action promoted by Cultural Animation sets it apart from traditional qualitative methods which typically revolve around interview, text analysis and observation (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015) although CA shares some similarities with Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). Inquiry arises out of, and its results feed back into, the practical activity concerned (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) while its ethos is egalitarian and participative. However, unlike PAR, CA is more explicit about its knowledge co-production agenda since it employs primarily creative; that is imaginative hands-on techniques such as crafts, music and art to enact it. By drawing upon a blend of linguistic and non-linguistic processes, Cultural Animation regards communication

as a shared and embodied social endeavour, a collaborative process carrying greater democratic potential for impact by revealing the nuances of difficult social or organizational problems and seeking to consider them in a bottom-up fashion. This represents a less “Newtonian” approach to impact and in this regard, Cultural Animation has significant potential for generating new co-produced insights for management and organization studies. The fact that it has not been applied extensively in this way can, we suggest, be attributed to a lack of awareness of the methodology and its benefits.

Applying Cultural Animation in Phases A and B

Phase A research involved 12 Cultural Animation workshops on the topics of volunteering, personal communities and communities in crisis. The workshops included over 500 community members representing grassroots groups, community-based organizations, arts organizations, national charities, umbrella organizations, local authorities, and the civil service. It also involved 10 academics from management and organization studies, design studies, architecture, geography, philosophy and communication studies. Participants came from Stoke-on-Trent, Manchester, London, Hastings, Edinburgh, Huddersfield, Rotherham, Birmingham (in the UK) as well as the municipality of Minami-Sanriku, Japan. The techniques used in each workshop involved working with everyday objects (like buttons, picture frames and newspapers) to create installations, poetry writing, music-making, dramatic performance which aimed to focus discussion and group decision-making. In both phases the workshops were facilitated by theatre practitioners. We refer to the participants who are not academics as “practitioners” for simplicity.

For the first time in 2014, practitioners were eligible to become co-investigators on a specific call relating to the “Legacy of the CC Programme”. To our knowledge no other research council in the UK or internationally has experimented with making practitioners co-

investigators and giving them equal rights in the bidding process. In 2014 the first author secured funding for a project that focused on evaluating the legacy of three CC projects carried out in Phase A. Two of the co-investigators on the legacy grant were practitioners. This legacy project is referred to as Phase B. Over 200 individuals were involved in Phase B and half of these had been also involved in the original research during Phase A. The participants came from academia, national and local government, arts organizations, public sector organizations, national and local charities, community groups, social enterprises and NGOs. Phase B focused on impact via two main questions: 1) What were the effects of the Cultural Animation methodology on the participants? 2) How did Cultural Animation shape the relationships between the academics and practitioners? These questions were central to our concern with defining and understanding impact through practical action.

Phase B research activities included 8 evaluative Cultural Animation workshops lasting approximately 6 hours each and 5 ‘scaling up’ workshops also lasting 6 hours each. The scaling up workshops were designed to attract new participants who had not been part of Phase A (as this was a requirement of the funding call). All Phase B workshops brought together new and existing participants in facilitated activities and discussions but their design was slightly different from Phase A’s workshops: Phase B exercises aimed to illuminate the lived effects of Phase A’s workshops on the individuals as well as to generate insights into practices of research impact more generally. Participants were asked by the cultural animator to articulate ideas and experiences relating to Phase A research in narrative form (via poems and stories) as well as in actions, images and art/craft installations.

Although Phase B differed from Phase A in design and orientation, it is possible to regard the use of Cultural Animation in both phases as self-referential. To mitigate that risk, the first author and an evaluator from the National Council for Voluntary Organizations did not

participate in Phase B exercises and instead carried out observations. These were noted in a running log and transcribed later into a neater set of observation notes. Phase B also drew on other forms of qualitative analysis. Between June 2014 and May 2015, the first author recorded 35 reflective post-workshop conversations with facilitators and participants (lasting 30 minutes each) and 5 post-workshop group discussions (lasting an hour). She also carried out 4 recorded semi-structured interviews with people new to the methodology and 20 interviews with the main academics and practitioners involved in Phase A. For practical reasons, 15 of these were conducted in places that were local to the participants and 9 were conducted by telephone. This amounted to 42 hours of interview time and 5 hours of group discussion. All data from interviews and observations was transcribed resulting in over 500 pages of material. In addition, after each workshop feedback forms were handed out to participants and collected and this was followed up with online questionnaires. In each of these surveys, the rate of response was between 60% and 80% giving us 123 responses.

In keeping with the theatrical, workshop style of the events, interview and conversation participants were encouraged to speak freely on topics that they felt were relevant to them and follow-up questions were often formulated on the basis of unexpected remarks (Bednarek-Gilland, 2015). In particular, participants were invited to give feedback on the nature of the research process. The questions focused on their experience of Cultural Animation, whether or not they felt that involvement in the CC research had made an impact upon their knowledge, whether and how making and doing had helped them connect with others, and whether they had built and sustained networks with the others. The authors analyzed the interview, discussion and survey data independently at first, using a content analysis approach (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015) and then cross checked for common themes and outliers. In doing so, we were not especially concerned with frequency analysis but instead sought to blend ‘an array of interpretive techniques’ (Van Maanen, 1979:520) to

develop appreciation for the meaning of conversations, events, and comments as they unfolded during the workshops and emerged in the transcription and survey data. Hence, we relied upon both the data and our own experience and observations of the research events to make sense of the comments made by participants.

Name games and other ice-breaker exercises started each workshop in Phases A and B and were designed to ensure that everybody knew and addressed one another by their first name. There was no further disclosure about one's identity or status which was important because the intention was for practitioner expertise and academic knowledge to be regarded as equally useful. Academics did not lead the Cultural Animation workshops; they were participants and as such their role was to listen, engage and contribute to the various debates and exercises run by the cultural animator without invoking their 'authority' on the subject. There were many instances in which non-academics became group leaders. There were, however, four reasons why academics remained important actors. First, they were essential in the funding, organising and network building processes that made the research possible in the first place. Second, the workshops attracted a diverse audience because of the reputation of the academics and institutions involved and the funding they had acquired for the project. Third, the experiential exercises were carefully planned by the cultural animators in close collaboration with the academics to ensure that the theoretical findings from the existing literature were at the heart of the exercises. Finally, the academics planned and executed the complementary qualitative methods in Phase B. Notwithstanding these important contributions, academics blended with the practitioners during the workshops, which was important for the co-productive and performative process. In the next section we offer examples of co-produced outputs from both Phase A and Phase B.

Outputs of Cultural Animation

Examples from Phase A

In Phase A, three Cultural Animation workshops took place on the theme of bridging the gap between academic rigour and community relevance when researching ‘communities in crisis’. The three sessions resulted in two artefacts: a Boat Installation (Figure 1) and a Tree Installation (Figure 2). The first workshop took place in a theatre near Stoke-on-Trent (a city disadvantaged by the decline of the coal, steel and ceramics industries) and had 50 participants including academics, policy makers, NGO representatives and community members. They were exposed to a storm created theatrically through visual and audio means. The animator encouraged them to salvage objects and get onto a (real) boat positioned at the centre of the stage to enact a journey to a new place where they could create and visualise a different future. The boat, which was initially bare, was gradually transformed into a living art work installation with the addition of various artefacts symbolising the new worlds created by the participants. After the event, theatre workers added silk sails to the boat imprinted with pictures taken at the workshop. The resulting artefact created a physical focus for future creative performances and craftwork, forming a symbolic bridge between the past and the future as well as between different parties collaborating to co-create ideas about an alternative world.

Figure 1: The boat installation on display at an international summit

Two further workshops, held in Minami-sanriku, Japan in 2013 focused upon the 2011 tsunami. The workshops were attended by academics and practitioners from local government, a retail cooperative, a temporary housing residents’ association (comprising 248 houses), a social enterprise, and the Citizens’ Association for Town Reconstruction. Cultural Animation methods focused mostly on object making (which required minimum translation

from Japanese in English). Objects appeared to be important and symbolic to the participants who had experienced loss in the aftermath of the natural disaster. The ‘Tree of life’ installation was produced along similar lines to the boat. Given the negative connotation of boats in the context of the tsunami, the concept of a tree was selected to reflect that in Japanese mythology the tree is a symbol of endurance and longevity. The tree was decorated with objects made during the workshops. For example, a group of elderly women made dolls, explaining that during childhood they did not have such possessions. From childhood stories, they moved on to talk about their life during the Second World War to then to share their tsunami experiences. The objects made in the workshops were ‘hung’ onto the bare branches of the tree as physical emblems of stories of survival and imagined hopes for the future. Like the boat, this was an installation themed around ‘lost worlds’ and imagining new ones through visual and creative forms. This shared theme was important since the underpinning aim of the CC Programme was to consider new approaches to academic-practitioner engagement and to the concept of social change and impact.

Figure 2: Tree of Life

Our third example is an interactive documentary drama named “Untold Stories of Volunteering” which was collaboratively designed and scripted from a collection of research data including anonymised transcripts of 19 interviews with volunteers (carried out in 2014 across the UK), as well as material artefacts co-created in 5 Cultural Animation workshops on the theme of volunteering. This drama focused on organizational practices relating to volunteering as well as the challenges faced by individual volunteers. The performance included voice-overs and scripted lines made up of interview extracts as well as songs and

poems written by the participants in the Cultural Animation workshops. It was showcased in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Leicester and London in June 2014 in front of large and diverse audiences.

Figure 3: Documentary drama on volunteering

Examples from Phase B

In Phase B, the first aim was to examine the extent to which Cultural Animation made a difference to the individuals involved in Phase A and to new individuals. In one workshop, participants were introduced to the boat installation which had been created in Phase A (Figure 1). They were given a practical task by the cultural animator: “you are survivors of an environmental catastrophe and are on a boat towards a new world. What messages would you put in a bottle for future generations?” (observation notes). They were then asked to create safe homes/communities in their new places by engaging with the following issues: “what objects would you save and take with you? What name would you give your new habitat? Create a charter or a set of rules for how you want to live in it” (observation notes). The cultural animator invited all participants to add their own stories, poems and any artefacts that they had made to the boat (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Creating new worlds together

The process of story-telling and object making appeared to provoke emotional engagement with the topic and triggered a powerful reflection on Phase A's materials as well as a sense of teamwork and collaboration in making new contributions. In choosing objects and negotiating the new charter, dialogues and 'deep' conversations quickly surfaced around individual and collective values and beliefs. Participants were encouraged to contextualise their ideas in stories about future communities. Observing this experience prompted us to consider that the performance of each task was collaborative and stimulated meaningful dialogue between practitioners and academics (Beech, MacIntosh & MacLean, 2010).

A second aim of Phase B was to examine practices of research and impact. For example in one workshop participants were asked to write cinquains (a form of five-line, structured poetry) about the meaning of research. Participants were given specific instructions by the animator about the number of words and theme to be used in each line; the first and the final lines had to be a synonym or different meaning of the word 'research'. In the resulting poems, a sample of which is reproduced below, research was described as an active process of transformation (poem 1), as a reflective process of inquiry (poem 2) and as a collective practice of being in the world with the others (poem 3).

Poem 1

Transformation

Metamorphosis, Rebirth

Change, Invigorate, Rumble

Doing, Doing, Doing, Doing

Done?

Poem 2

Seek

Investigate, Evaluate

Questions, Options, Confusion

Listening, Thinking, Looking, Knowing

See

Poem 3

Us

Diverse, Together

Challenges, Boundaries, Messages

Compromise, Survive, Discriminate, Story Telling

ME/WE

Participants then reflected upon the poetry writing exercise as a group. They chose to articulate the impact of research in terms of ‘what lives on or continues after a project is completed’ (observation notes) and agreed that impact is not just what has changed as a result of the research but what is still being used or ‘living’ (observation notes). They concluded that the word ‘legacy’ was an important ingredient in defining impact. Social networks and academic-practitioner relationships were seen as examples of such living legacies. In a subsequent workshop, the animator asked participants to reflect further upon the relationship between academia and the community by using a variety of colourful buttons to help them tell stories. The performative process of sorting, labelling, categorising and narrating information about the buttons (Figure 5) within a facilitated workshop setting provided the material means by which participants visually represented and performed their experiences of these relationships.

Figure 5: The relationship between academia and communities

Reframing impact

Participation and observation in Phases A and B showed that Cultural Animation created an immersive experience through CA exercises designed to (temporarily) suspend barriers and insecurities and facilitate communication across the academic/practitioner divide. We noted that Cultural Animation encouraged contentious and potentially difficult themes to be explored in a hands-on way through craft making and storytelling rather than formally planned academic debate. In this section, we draw upon interview, observation and survey data from Phase B to reflect on 1) how participants transformed CA using it to their own ends beyond phase A; and 2) how CA facilitated the development of collaborative relationships (networks) that continued beyond phase A. Standing on the shoulders of American Pragmatism, we demonstrate how we can refine the meaning of impact to incorporate relational, collaborative and temporal elements facilitated by our creative methods.

Our qualitative findings from Phase B show that there was a clear intention among practitioners and academics to utilise and adapt various Cultural Animation techniques within organizational and personal settings. Indeed, some had already implemented the method themselves or had invited an animator to do so for them. For us, this highlighted a degree of impact along American Pragmatist lines. Specifically, we noted that participants perceived value in Cultural Animation's capacity to a) facilitate productive discussion and group work in non-hierarchical fashion, b) inspire creativity and innovation through experience and c) encourage learning and self-development in "safety".

The data we collected in Phase B demonstrated that Cultural Animation could be applied in a variety of organizations. For example, a manager from a housing association (involved in both phases) who used the techniques in her own organization stated:

Cultural Animation levelled the difference between residents and managers. In any setting you may get some voices heard more than others, but with this methodology people who do not normally participate, felt safe and able to speak up freely in front of the managers (interview transcript).

For this participant, the application of Cultural Animation was not only useful for managing meetings but it increased the potential for dialogue and idea-sharing across the everyday hierarchies implicit in manager-resident relations. Other participants drew on the relationships they had forged during the workshops to invite animators into their organizations. A social entrepreneur said that after having been part of Phase A:

We invited the cultural animator to run a few workshops for us as we were struggling to map out our priorities and people seemed disengaged. The effect has been dramatic and the seeds planted in the workshops continue to grow (conversation notes).

This participant suggested that Cultural Animation helped facilitate greater engagement in strategic decision-making and that the benefits of the method were continuing beyond the workshops. This point was echoed by a senior manager in the NHS who was involved in a specific health-themed Cultural Animation workshop in Phase A. She reported that:

Doctors, nurses and other hospital personnel felt inspired by the Cultural Animation exercises. No other forum or technique we used before has been so effective in terms of collective learning and idea sharing (interview transcript).

The concept of collective learning through idea-sharing was emphasised by other participants. An employee from the local authority who was intending to use the method in practice said: “I will use this technique to encourage co-operation, idea-sharing and community engagement” (on line survey), while a charity manager emphasised the creative and innovative capacity of the workshops, “I liked the dramatic aspect [of the workshops], as it gave scope for different skills and creativity. I will take that away and think about new ways to enliven group work (conversation notes).” Likewise, a manager from a national charity suggested that Cultural Animation “creates an opportunity for people of different status to work together and make best use of their experience and creativity, something that is worth trying out at work ...” (on line survey).

For all these participants, there were some valued take-away messages from the CC programme; some had already tried the method at work and found it beneficial while others were hoping to do so to draw on collaborative, democratic and creative processes to drive change. In Phase B, several participants also spoke about personal motivation and learning rather than organizational or community benefits and found particular value in the sense of co-producing knowledge in ‘safety’. One participant who is an ex-offender claimed that the workshops helped her to expand her “mind and vocabulary” and that “meeting decent, hard-working, caring people” made her feel “clever and useful” (interview transcript) so much so that she was considering returning to education. We conclude from this that *impact is represented by changes in thinking and/or doings of the participants as a result of testing ideas that emerged in CA workshops in practical scenarios.*

The use and creation of objects was immediately helpful for building relationships during the workshops. According to participants, their very ordinariness helped people feel secure enough to have in-depth conversations and mitigated the awkwardness that can sometimes be prompted by new social situations and the discussion of sensitive or emotionally charged

subjects. There was a longer term impact of the objects too as they travelled between workshops to provide the focus for further Cultural Animation exercises with new members. Analysis of the Phase B data highlighted that participants perceived value in Cultural Animation's capacity to a) generate memorable and surprising learning experiences in collaboration and b) inspire the development of relationships beyond the day of the workshop.

Demonstrating the memorable nature of Cultural Animation, one participant said that:

I keep thinking back on various things we did/I thought which I'm surprised at. The experience seems more persistent than I'd expect for a workshop (interview transcript).

Echoing this sense of 'persistence', another participant claimed that her memory of a Phase A workshop was focused on a piece of artwork created on the day:

Creating a picture [out of objects] was really interesting. I was surprised. It really felt that in a very short time, we'd said some of the most important things about what's happening in our area. The picture itself was very memorable (conversation transcript).

The element of surprise was something that an academic participant also referred to in describing 'flashpoints' of learning during a workshop:

You're thinking of your [own] research agenda but then you get flashpoints where someone says something new to you or to each other that is just unexpected. It was the result of engaging with the objects and creating stuff together (interview transcript).

An academic co-investigator from Phase A phrased the memorable nature of Cultural Animation as a form of ‘magic’ lingering on after the event with the power to transform the participant:

I can’t put my finger on it, there is something powerful and long lasting about Cultural Animation, some sort of magic that changes people for the better and makes them more *human*. I have now used these techniques on four other projects and more and more people keep asking about it (interview transcript).

From our perspective, it was not magic but rather the persuasive power of a method that brought together and strengthened actor networks that engendered such persuasive potential for memorable learning and reflection after the workshops. This was supported by further interview data. For example, with regard to the network-building potential of the workshops, a theatre practitioner/cultural animator involved in both phases argued that:

The process of collaborating, creating and connecting accelerates the formation of genuine relationships which do not evaporate as the research ends, but remain an important living legacy in contrast to ‘hit and run’ research (interview transcript).

The experience of “genuine relationships” mediated through objects was something which other participants referred to. One stated that “It felt like I was able to express my personal opinion easily, because there were objects to use to do so...people very quickly moved to high level in-depth thinking” (local authority policy adviser, interview transcript) and another stated “there is something about using an object to speak for you, making it easier to speak for yourself as a result” (grass roots organization manager, interview transcript). Objects apparently made it simpler for participants to listen to and appreciate the views of others as well as to express their own “in-depth thinking”.

The level of involvement required during the workshops encouraged lasting connections to the projects and a striking feature of this was how the installations developed in Phase A were able to transfer into new contexts, enrolling support from new participants in the UK but also in other countries such as Japan, Canada and Greece. The Boat and the Tree of Life installations, for example, were displayed in an event commemorating the Holocaust in Rotherham in January 2014 and connections were formed with Sheffield University and community partners in the region. The installations then became centre pieces at a mental health workshop in Huddersfield in November, 2014 and connections were developed with Huddersfield University. In May 2015, the Tree of Life represented the CC programme at a community-academia engagement conference in Victoria, Canada and in September, 2015, it travelled to Athens as part of a different CC project led by the Open University. In October 2016, the installations were displayed once more at an international community based research summit. At each point in their journeys, the artefacts facilitated the development of new connections and collaborations; something evidenced through a growing e-mail address list of interested contacts maintained by our university which eventually developed into a research centre: Centre for Community Animation and Social Innovation (CASIC - <https://www.keele.ac.uk/casic/>). Thus, the immediate impact of being involved in CA exercises have transformed into *longer term legacies sustained by growing networks of individuals, ideas and materials*.

Discussion and conclusion

In highlighting the processes and effects of Cultural Animation during the Connected Communities Programme, our article responds to calls for pluralistic conceptualisations of impact in management studies (Aguinis et al, 2014) but also highlights that creative methods generate interest, surprise and engagement between academics and practitioners (Fleming & Banerjee, 2015). Our study demonstrates how and where impact can be achieved in

empirical settings (Romme et al, 2015) and we have highlighted how participants framed their experiences in positive terms; as a means to learn, develop social connections, broker negotiations and manage potentially difficult interactions. We have suggested that the experiences generated lasting impacts, more accurately reflected by the term *legacy*. This has enabled us to offer two definitions of impact inspired by theory. In this concluding section, we bring together these definitions and argue that impact arises from *research co-produced collaboratively and creatively with practitioners*.

This definition of impact provides a distinctive framework for considering the dynamic relationship between academic practice (how academics produce and use knowledge) and practitioner practice (how practitioners produce and use knowledge) in empirical terms. It contextualizes the empirical “evidence” that we have highlighted; that is, the installations, exercises and dramatic performances that relied upon active collaboration between academics and practitioners during the CC Programme. The collaborative, creative research (Kara, 2015) and co-creation processes (Antonacopoulou, 2010) that underpinned this evidence supports our contention that Cultural Animation generates both immediate and lasting effects upon participants who spoke about “flashpoints” of insight, creativity, empathy as well as persistent memories of objects and “interesting” experiences.

The common threads connecting all the Cultural Animation work we have described thus far are the notions of practical action and performance (Mason, Kjellberg & Hagberg, 2015). Cultural Animation adopts performance in a literal sense in that those involved in workshops are immersed in reflexive and embodied practices so participants move around, talk, listen, make things and bring objects to life with stories and anecdotes. Such imaginative exercises make a powerful impression on those involved precisely because of the embodied and creative nature of their participation. When participants are requested to reflect on a particular issue such as “volunteering” or “crisis”, for example, they are being encouraged to think,

theorize, feel, act, reflect and perform with artefacts. The power of Cultural Animation lies in the attendant fusion of thought, action and experience (MacIntosh et al, 2012) and its impact occurs through the performance of co-created tasks. What has surprised us most during the course of the research is that CA transformed from a means of brokering community engagement into a methodology of knowledge co-production which shared the four principles of Dewey's democratic experimentalism.

As the momentum for researching marginalized communities has grown, the impetus for developing more democratic research methods has also gathered pace, something which CA addresses by placing 'experiential expertise' (Collins and Evans, 2007; Durose and Richardson, 2015), a questioning of knowledge hierarchies (Fischer, 2000) and closer ties to the community (Ostrom, 1996) at its heart. As a form of "engaged scholarship" (Gauntlett, 2007), Cultural Animation challenges us to question 'not only dominant, entrenched ways of knowing and acting - but also those of conducting research' (Culhane, 2017: 58) although this inevitably entails the consideration of a number of challenges and obstacles. The first of these relates to the sorts of 'data' researchers can expect from Cultural Animation and how such data can be interpreted. Given the creative and improvisational approach of CA, further reflection on the nature of its outputs or "evidence" is needed. In this article, we have highlighted visual, textual and verbal outputs but for those more comfortable with traditional empirical material, however, these may be challenging. Conventionally, qualitative methods share findings through speaking, writing and publishing but craft objects like trees or boats are co-produced by participants coming together from varied backgrounds which demands that 'outsiders' then have to engage with and de-code these non-traditional forms.

Furthermore, as with studies of temporary communities and social settings (such as festivals or airports for example), it may not be possible to capture and track all the 'data' which

emerges from a CA event as individuals return to their own lifeworlds. Interestingly, however, we have observed that there is potential to create and nurture new communities and networks *through the method itself*, something which we observed in Phase B when many individuals returned to the CC programme to work with us again. During this time, participants expressed their ideas of impact as ‘what was left behind’ from Phase A (for example, learning, objects, networks, memories of events and artefacts) but - more importantly - what was ‘living on and continuing’ in Phase B and beyond. The practical and sociable nature of these experiences – alongside the unconventional material objects produced during them - holds the key to tracing the longer-term outputs and effects of Cultural Animation.

The second challenge involves understanding more about the way academics perceive CA in order to explain the occasional moments of suspicion and discomfort that we observed during the workshops. With its theatrical, workshop-based approach, not everybody is comfortable with Cultural Animation and some people seemed reluctant to join in with performances and craft. During one workshop, for example, one academic decided to leave the room. Another academic reflected that this “made clear the value and intention of discomfort” (interview transcript) and from our perspective, we now need to reflect upon how forms of discomfort play differently into the process and substance of collective and individual experience. While over one third of the practitioners we worked with in Phase A regarded the unconventional nature of Cultural Animation as a positive advantage because they felt included in processes of knowledge creation, it appeared that for some academics, practitioner engagement was destabilizing, particularly among those who tended towards theoretical or abstract work rather than policy or practice-orientated research.

Walker (2010) states that – far from embracing the concept of impact, academic practices are,

for many a refuge *from* community engagement, with peer review acting as a form of epistemological protectionism asserting monopoly rights to defining and legitimating knowledge. Culhane (2017: 58) attributes this to the traditional tendency for academic researchers to marginalize their own senses during research, or at least to privilege the ‘higher senses’ of scholarship over craft and play. CA may be confronting to some precisely because it prompts all participants to engage in embodied, sociable, playful and sensory forms of action which are guided by ‘common sense’ rather than high theory. From our perspective, however, it is precisely this which contours the most meaningful forms of engagement and impact for as Culhane (2017: 58) writes, ‘Critical work begins by interrogating legacies that have created and defined the categories we are trained to think and work with.’

More work is needed to tackle the barriers that block the uptake of new and different research methods like CA within the research community (Durose and Richardson, 2015). This is not simply to reopen the age-old debates between positivist and post-positivist ways of seeing knowledge but demands we reflect on the very notion of what academic work should look like if, as Rhodes, Wright and Pullen (2017) suggest, ‘University research might have a relationship with preserving or enhancing democratic society’. While the impact agenda provides a stimulus for invigorating such thinking, many academics struggle to establish the value of their outputs within the timeframe and format of the assessment cycle. This is exacerbated by uncertainty over the precise meaning of impact (something we have attempted to clarify in this article) as well as the austerity-driven demand to compete for funding by placing extrinsic or market value on cultural, educational and social activities. In this context, it is particularly important to explore the potential of creative and socially engaged methods such as Cultural Animation.

Fenge et al (2018: 13) argue that ‘research that is meaningful is never really “finished”, and that impact is more than ‘a moment in the sun—an explosion of a scientific “breakthrough” on the public scene—then yesterday’s news.’ Complimenting this perspective, the techniques we have highlighted offer a valuable tool for shaping new ‘trading zones’ that integrate ‘knowledge across diverse theoretical and methodological traditions’ (Romme et al, 2015:549). We believe that such knowledge ‘trading zones’ (ibid, 2015) are essential for evaluating the practical relevance of academic theory by generating realistic and innovative ways of thinking and acting (Aguinis et al, 2014) as well as promoting the “long tail” of engagement that supports impact (Fenge et al, 2018).

This observation has strong resonance for organizations where a desire to blend immediate and long-term change often drives managerial planning, decision-making and strategy. For example, Cultural Animation offers a distinctive array of practical techniques, whether in conjunction with academic partners or not and these could be applied to problem-solving, meeting facilitation and team work projects. They could be used by working parties, for example, to select and prioritize sensitive issues, dilemmas and problems for analysis. They could also benefit the establishment of groups and teams of differently qualified, differently skilled individuals when they come together to engage in innovative and creative work. At the very least, Cultural Animation represents a fresh alternative to traditional team-building events such as away-days. There are potential applications to a range of settings including hospitals, prisons, policing, social services and care organizations in which there is demanding, complex, “dirty” or ambiguous work (Dick, 2005). It may assist in organizations where there is distrust, resistance or limited communication between “factions” and departmental “silos”.

This would be especially helpful where the problems in need of resolution require plural

perspectives from stakeholders that rarely interact beyond e-mail and case-notes, for example social services or health workers dealing with complex cases. Cultural Animation may also provide a possible means to help organizational actors see problems from multiple perspectives to promote greater empathy and mitigate the de-humanizing effects of working with large and/or repetitive case-loads (Tracy, 2000). Cultural Animation could help organizational members to work together productively to connect the “means” and “ends” of service provision. Indeed, the CC programme has already conducted several health-themed workshops which have taken patient/users perspectives and presented them alongside those of professionals and academics.

To conclude, this article has presented three definitions of impact; first, as changes in thinking and/or doings as a result of testing ideas in practical scenarios; second as a legacy living on in future knowledge or collaborations and made powerful in growing networks; and third, as research co-produced creatively and collaboratively with practitioners. The latter, over-arching definition stresses that impact is a process performed in interactive and co-creational settings and we have shown how Cultural Animation makes this possible through embodied and sensory interaction between people, spaces and objects. This finding generates broader questions for the way we think about the place of creative research methods in organization and management studies as well as about the role of academics in knowledge production more generally. While the literature on these themes is steadily growing (Antonacopoulou, 2010) and despite some recent cases of note (Avenier & Parmentier Cajaiba, 2012; Beech, MacIntosh & MacLean, 2010; Bartunek, 2007; Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Lorino, Tricard & Clot, 2011), the range of methods and techniques we have outlined in this article offer many new ideas for research. Our aspiration is that our account stimulates further meaningful interactions between academics and practitioners, co-creating new forms

of knowledge that have practical significance in the myriad communities that lie beyond the ‘ivory towers’ of our universities.

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5